

Recent violence renews talk of Guardian Angels

NORWALK

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An uptick in crime prompted talk about bringing the Guardian Angels to Norwalk last year but, despite a trio of recent robberies, the formation of a local chapter of the group has steadily lost momentum.

Al Raymond, the point-person for the proposed Norwalk chapter of the Guardian Angels, said the idea is not dead, but there has been no significant progress in organizing a local chapter of the citizens crime watch group.

"In light of all the recent violence, I can't understand why they don't want more eyes and ears on the streets to help them," he said

The Guardian Angels came together in New York City in the late 1970s to "to take back the community," group founder Curtis Sliwa told The Hour last year. Volunteers rode subway trains and used citizens arrests to detain criminals for police.

The organization since has grown to include more than 100 safety-patrol chapters worldwide, according to the Guardian Angels' Web site.

Despite the group's successes, the Angels have also faltered in some communities.

Recently, a Guardian Angels chapter in Millville, PA, disbanded 18 months after its formation, as members lost interest in the group and patrols became virtually nonexistent, according to The Press, an Atlantic City-based newspaper.

The Guardian Angels walked the streets of Norwalk six times since the initial proposal to bring a chapter of the community group to the city. They took their last stroll through town sometime in the middle of the summer, Raymond said.

The group wouldn't have stopped the recent robberies, Raymond said, but would have made the community feel safer.

Serious talks about forming a local chapter cooled down last summer because the group was met with resistance from Mayor Richard A. Moccia and Police Chief Harry Rilling, according to Sliwa.

"I don't understand the blockhead approach in Norwalk," he said. "Eventually, there will be a Guardian Angels chapter in Norwalk. So, they should work with us instead of against us."

For his part, Moccia said Norwalkers are free to form a Guardian Angels chapter.

Rilling, who declined to comment for the story, previously told The Hour that he was supportive of residents who want to form neighborhood watch groups, but having the Guardian Angels patrol the streets would make Norwalk look like an undesirable community.

Councilman Michael Geake -- who initially floated the idea of bringing the Guardian Angels to town -- said he would still like to see them

patrolling the streets. "They're just a neighborhood watch group with funny hats," he said.